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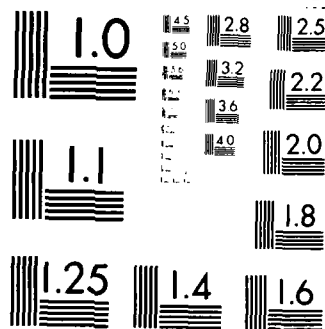
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AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE

STUDENT REPORT

THE HELICOPTER TO FIXED WING CONVERSION
PROGRAM -- A CRITICAL REVIEW

MAJOR LEE T. MASSEY

85-1750

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REPORT NUMBER 85-1750

TITLE THE HELICOPTER TO FIXED WING CONVERSION PROGRAM -- A
CRITICAL REVIEW

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Submitted to the faculty in partial fulfillment of
requirements for graduation.

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PREFACE

The thing is, helicopters are different from planes. An airplane by its nature wants to fly, and if not interfered with too strongly by unusual events or by a deliberately incompetent pilot, it will fly. A helicopter does not want to fly. It is maintained in the air by a variety-of-forces and controls working in opposition to each other, and if there is any disturbance in this delicate balance, the helicopter stops flying, immediately and disastrously. There is no such thing as a gliding helicopter.

This is why a helicopter pilot is so different from being an airplane pilot and why, in general, airplane pilots are open, clear-eyed buoyant extroverts, and helicopter pilots are brooders, introspective anticipators of trouble. They know if something bad has not happened, it is about to.

HARRY REASONER, 16 February 1971.

In the United States Air Force today, helicopter pilots are different. Why? First, they are trained by the United States Army to fly USAF helicopters. Then four-to-seven years later, if they have the opportunity to convert to fixed wing aircraft, and not all do, they must first complete the entire USAF undergraduate pilot training program. If they do not convert to fixed wing aircraft, they remain a helicopter pilot in a fixed wing oriented Air Force with little hope of progressing to senior staff or command positions in the USAF. This study reviews the impact of current training and rated management philosophy on "career opportunities" for Air Force helicopter pilots and recommends alternative training methods to improve career opportunities for this part of the USAF rated force.

Many thanks to Majors Terry Hart, Skip Mills and Jerry Cruik at AFMPC for their assistance in providing the statistics for this study. In addition, special thanks to my faculty advisor, Major Danny Rimkus, and my sponsor, Lieutenant Colonel Bob McGuire, for their motivational support throughout this project.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Major Lee T. Massey graduated from the University of Dubuque in 1971 and entered Officer Training School that same year. He received his wings through the US Army's undergraduate helicopter pilot training program in 1972. Major Massey had flying assignments in Wyoming, Thailand and New Mexico prior to being assigned to Headquarters Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, in 1978. For the past five years, Major Massey has been involved in helicopter rated management and pilot assignments with tours at Headquarters Military Airlift Command and the Air Force Manpower and Personnel Center, Randolph Air Force Base, Texas. Major Massey is a graduate of Squadron Officer School and has completed Air Command and Staff College by seminar. He received a masters degree from Webster University in 1982.

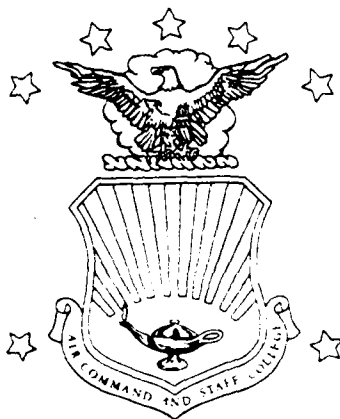
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REPORT NUMBER 85-1750

AUTHOR MAJOR LEE T. MASSEY, USAF

TITLE THE HELICOPTER TO FIXED WING CONVERSION PROGRAM -- A CRITICAL REVIEW

I. Purpose: To examine the USAF undergraduate helicopter pilot training (UPT-H) and the fixed wing qualification conversion (FWQ) programs to determine what impact the method and sequence of training has on career opportunities for helicopter pilots.

II. Problem: Since 1970, USAF helicopter pilots have been trained through the U.S. Army's undergraduate helicopter pilot training program at Fort Rucker, Alabama. This training produces pilots operationally restricted to helicopters until they complete the fixed wing conversion program. The current fixed wing conversion program involves sending volunteers with four-to-seven years rated service in helicopters, to one of the five ATC bases to complete the entire UPT program. This results in the pilot being in pipeline training for approximately one and one-half years prior to becoming a

CONTINUED

co-pilot in a fixed wing aircraft. The impact of this long training pipeline, coupled with a new guy/co-pilot OER, may not be a true indication of the potential of these officers for a critical two and one-half year period. Those pilots who remain in helicopters, either because they do not volunteer for conversion or are not selected for conversion by an annual selection board, are operationally restricted to helicopters for the remainder of their career. Since the helicopter force represents only 4.7% of the USAF pilot force, the operational need for a helicopter pilot, especially one with just helicopter experience, in senior command or staff positions is extremely limited. Elimination of this restriction is the very reason the Air Force has the conversion program. This study focuses on two issues associated with this training philosophy: (1) Is the USAF providing realistic career opportunities for helicopter pilots who attend FWQ as well as those who remain in helicopters? (2) Can the USAF provide better career opportunities for helicopter pilots by enacting changes to current training programs while continuing to meet experience requirements in the helicopter force?

III Discussion. The rated management decisions which brought about UPT-H and the FWQ programs have their roots in a Congressional desire to consolidate helicopter training and reduce training costs in general. This study explores the resultant problems concerning career opportunities and surveys the future operational needs of the helicopter force to determine if alternative training methods would resolve the issues presented above. The author's analysis of these problems is based, in part, on an understanding of the assignment/career development system gained the past five years at AFMPC and Hq MAC and supported with the opinions of senior commanders in the helicopter force. Two options are suggested to resolve the issues. The first alternative entails a conversion program which would eliminate FWQ training via UPT and accomplish training through a two or three month short course syllabus. Along with this change, the four to seven year window would be eliminated and, as a result, expand the crossflow opportunity to any

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time in an officer's career. The second alternative suggests the USAF adopt a tri-track specialized undergraduate pilot training program, in lieu of the dual track program which is programmed to begin in 1988. In effect, qualify the helicopter pilot in fixed wing aircraft by providing all required training up front. The study details how both options improve career opportunities for helicopter pilots and increases the experience levels in the helicopter force.

IV Conclusions: The USAF can provide better career opportunities for helicopter pilots as well as improve operational experience levels in the helicopter force by enacting changes to these training programs. While this conclusion is based on a subjective analysis of career opportunities by the author, and supported with the opinions of the senior leadership in the helicopter force, nevertheless, that assessment is based on the real world lessons of personnel management in the Air Force today. Program changes are required now to preclude a closed-loop helicopter force which does not offer helicopter pilots the opportunity to progress to senior staff and command positions in the USAF.

V Recommendations: The USAF should accomplish fixed wing conversion training with short course training and eliminate the four-to-seven year window for this training. By adopting this recommendation, helicopter pilots have the opportunity to crossflow to other weapon systems any time in their careers. However, the author also suggests Hq. USAF/MP/XO study the possibility of incorporating helicopter training into the specialized pilot training program to provide a long term solution to the issue.

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

The USAF helicopter training programs and rated management policies which influence career opportunities in the helicopter career field are unique within the rated force. Since 1970, Air Force helicopter pilots have received their wings by attending the United States Army's undergraduate helicopter pilot training (UPT-H) at Fort Rucker, Alabama. Then, four-to-seven years after graduation from UPT-H, selected volunteers are converted to fixed wing systems through the fixed wing qualification conversion program (FWQ) via undergraduate pilot training. UPT-H, which produces limited duty helicopter-only pilots, was the result of a 1969 Congressional mandate. The rationale for the fixed wing conversion program, an Air Force decision, is based upon the philosophy expressed in the USAF Personnel Plan. The Personnel Plan, Vol. II, states: "There is no action planned or required that would reorganize the Air Force into a corps structure with the resultant narrow specialization of its officer force into particular functions" (3.1-2).

Until July 1976, all officers augmented into the helicopter force were guaranteed the opportunity to attend fixed wing conversion training. By FY1983, the Air Force had satisfied its guarantee with these pilots, although, not all elected to convert to fixed wing systems. Those officers who began training after July 1976 were advised the fixed wing opportunity may or may not be available--based on the needs of the Air Force. Today, that program sends the 10 most qualified volunteers, identified through an annual AFMPC/MAJCOM board, to undergraduate pilot training (UPT).

course (i.e., C-130 training) without attending a conversion course. In addition, these senior leaders were also concerned about the loss of experience the FWO program has on experience levels in the cockpit. The yearly loss of 10 highly qualified pilots from the four-to-seven year group was generally affecting the rated experience within their wings. However, while they offered to the exact approach the Air Force should take to resolve the issue, they definitely felt a change should be made (15---, 19---, 21---, 22---).

SUMMARY

In summary, there are problems inherent in the method and sequence by which the USAF trains its helicopter pilots. While these problems evolved through a series of rated management decisions made since the early 1970s, both AFMPC and the senior leadership in the helicopter force agree, the total effect makes helicopter pilots less competitive for both promotion and rated opportunities when compared to their fixed wing counterpart. This position is also supported by the Air Force representative when he testified before Congress in 1980 (12-H-245). However, the "career opportunity" issue is not the only issue which must be considered. In the next chapter, the author will discuss challenges facing the helicopter force in the next few years. Then, following this review of operational concerns, the author will suggest alternatives aimed at both individual as well as operational needs.

one-half years, and possibly one or two more prior to the majors board, just how competitive will they be? The conclusion that they will be less competitive for both promotion and selection to attend intermediate service school in residence definitely has strong merit.

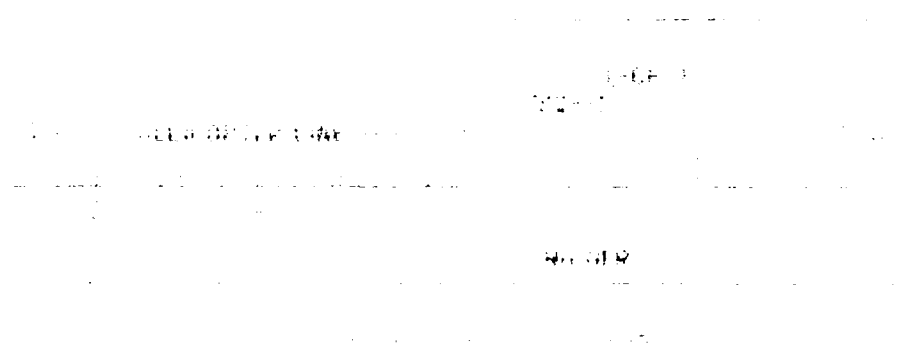
Still, there are arguments on the degree the careers of these officers are adversely impacted. But, when you weigh the stated rationale for USAF continuation of the FWQ program and the answers to the questions on promotion and professional military education, the author questions it. In fact, the Air Force is improving "career opportunities" for these pilots. However, like their helicopter-only counterparts, a precise assessment can only be made after promotions rates to lieutenant colonel and colonel are available to compare. Because there are arguments on both sides of the issue, the author feels it important to present the opinions of senior commanders in the helicopter force and address both this issue, and the helicopter-only "limitation" issue, from their perspective.

The senior leadership in the helicopter force generally agrees that up to the rank of lieutenant colonel, helicopter pilots have excellent opportunity for operational command and staff opportunities within the Command (MAC). However, after that the opportunities are significantly reduced. It is important to note that the group these leaders refer to is the dual rated group of senior majors and lieutenants colonels within the force. They envision it being more difficult for helicopter-only pilots to be placed into operational line or staff jobs in the Command as senior field graders- especially at the colonel level. As a group, the leadership agreed it is much more difficult to place helicopter pilots into operational positions above MAJCOM level (15 --, 19 --, 21 --, 22 --).

These senior leaders are unanimous in the belief the current fixed wing conversion program is not what the USAF needs, although they defend the concept of crossflow. They do not believe helicopter pilots need to be put through the full BPT course to make them fixed wing qualified. Instead, some felt a type of "conversion" course with unnecessary "crossflow" training for helicopter pilots directly to the fixed wing aircraft control qualifications training

officers who were the initial second lieutenants in the UPI-H program in 1970. These pilots are not yet senior enough to reflect, by promotion statistics, how this limitation impacts job opportunity and promotions to lieutenant colonel/colonel. As a result, an accurate assessment can only be made when statistics of lieutenant colonel and colonel promotions are available to compare with other factors, i.e., senior staff/command opportunity, etc. Nevertheless, despite the difficulty of assessing "career opportunities," two factors are undeniable. First, the Air Force acknowledged this limitation when a spokesman testified before Congress in April 1980, stating: "Transitioning to a fixed wing pilot enhances a helicopter pilot's chance for full career progression through increased opportunities to serve in senior staff and command positions" (12:H-245). Secondly, the fact that crossflow, outside the four-to-seven year window, is not possible and that rated opportunities are limited to a weapon system which represents less than 5% of the total pilot force (17.--).

The final group within the helicopter force consist of those young pilots who still have the fixed wing conversion decision ahead of them. For these pilots the question is: "Should I volunteer to attend FWQ and spend one and one-half years in pipeline training, or do I remain in helicopters and limit myself to the helicopter career field?" Figure 3 illustrates the dilemma they face. If they attend FWQ, and the average pilot attends at the six and one-half year point (14.--), then the next OER they will have would be in their ninth year. With this "new guy"/co-pilot OER, the first OER in two and



opportunity/decision before them. As a result of the different background of each group, "career opportunities" also differ and will be discussed separately.

First, the dual-rated group makes up the senior leadership of the helicopter force--essentially all the senior majors and lieutenant colonels. Pilots in this group do not have "system imposed" restrictions on crossflow between weapon systems. Crossflow is, for the most part, at the request of the MAJCOM and is into supervisory type positions. As examples of this crossflow: (1) a below-the-zone lieutenant colonel was recently assigned from the Pentagon to be the Commander of a T-39 unit; and (2) a new lieutenant colonel in a helicopter Detachment Commander position was selected to to be the Ops Officer of a composite H-60/C-130 Squadron and, following C-130 training, was to maintain currency in the C-130 (14--). However, while the opportunity for crossflow is there, the recent trend for this group to hold operational positions as colonels, within or outside the helicopter force, has not been encouraging.

In Twenty-Third Air Force (MAC) there are four Wings which have most of the helicopters in the USAF. In these Wings, there are 12 operational positions--Wing/CC, CV, DO--where pilots with helicopter experience could be assigned to prepare for further advancement. However, only 1 of these 12 positions is filled with a helicopter pilot (promoted to colonel from the helicopter ranks) and only 1 other has had helicopter experience in his career. On balance, looking at rated opportunities outside helicopters, one colonel has crossed from helicopters to C-141s and is now Vice Commander of an Airlift Wing (18--). From these statistics, any number of possible conclusions might be drawn. However, the author wants to highlight two factors: (1) the opportunity for crossflow is there, and (2) the statistics may look quite different next year considering the yearly turnover in these key positions.

The second group, the majority of the middle managers in the helicopter force, are helicopter-only qualified. These pilots received their wings through the Army UPT-H program and are operationally limited to helicopters. To debate the impact of this "limitation" is subjective and difficult to quantify because the senior officers in this group are 2-year majors, those

Chapter Three

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

The USAF does not have a formula by which commanders and the personnel system can assess "career opportunities" for pilots within any major weapon system. Thus, personal interpretations of career opportunities and limitations are varied and cover a wide spectrum of opinions. As a result, the author's experience in the personnel management and assignments area, along with the opinions of senior commanders in the helicopter force, are certainly important to this study. In addition, the fact that the USAF continues to support the universally assignable pilot concept through the fixed wing conversion program, emphasizes the USAF commitment to continue the crossflow of helicopter pilots to fixed wing systems. It is within this framework the author wishes to highlight areas in the current program which impact "career opportunities" and which will be used to weigh options in Chapter Five.

To begin, the helicopter force has essentially three distinct groups. First, a more senior--dual-rated--group which was fixed wing qualified before being assigned to helicopters in the 1960s. Included in this dual-rated group are those Army trained helicopter pilots who remained in ATC following FWQ and are now back in helicopters, and a number of first assignment instructor pilots (FAIPs) who are assigned to helicopters each year (10 per year) via the major weapon system selection board. (This fixed wing to helicopter conversion has been conducted concurrently with UPT-H at Fort Rucker, Alabama since 1971.) The second group of pilots, junior majors and senior captains, are helicopter-only types who have been trained by the Army since 1970, and have declined conversion to fixed wing. Finally, the third group are junior captains and lieutenants who still have the fixed wing

Then in March 1984, with yearly quotas reduced to 10, AFMPC initiated plans for a yearly FWQ board to select volunteers for conversion (from the non-guaranteed group) based on a competitive selection process (6.1). By this time, all the FWQ "guaranteed" helicopter pilots had either accepted or declined conversion. The first board was held in June 1984 to select the 10 volunteers to attend UPT in FY1985. The results of this board, specifically, the average time in service for those selected, will serve as basis for discussion in the next chapter.

SUMMARY

Since 1969, rated management decisions concerning the helicopter force have been marked by a desire to comply with the wish of Congress, meet the operational requirements within the helicopter force; and, at the same time, still keep faith with the Air Force goal of developing and employing "fully qualified" pilots. The USAF position to require all helicopter pilots to convert to fixed wing aircraft following their initial tour in helicopters has drastically changed since 1970 when the CSAF accepted the recommendations of the working group. The program has evolved from one which would have required every helicopter pilot to convert to fixed wing systems--or give up his wings--to the current program which sends 10 volunteers a year to UPT. A review of the rationale behind these rated management decisions causes the author to conclude that many decisions were made as reactions to problems outside the helicopter force and did not include a long term analysis of impacts on career opportunities for helicopter pilots. As a result, career opportunities for helicopter pilots have been affected. In the next chapter, the author will highlight impacts of the current program on career opportunities for those pilots who attend fixed wing conversion as well as those who remain within helicopters.

with the declining number of yearly FWQ quotas, the cost of moving the program and setting it up at another base was significant.

By incorporating the training with UPT, with its lower instructor pilot/student ratio, a more qualified pilot with more flying time would be produced at no increase in costs (7 -)

During this period, AFMPC was finding it more difficult to fill the yearly FWQ quota of 40 per year. Several factors contributed to the situation. First, smaller UPT-H year groups were entering the four-to-seven year FWQ window. This smaller year group population, coupled with poor pilot retention in helicopters between 1979-1981, made it extremely difficult to assign helicopter pilots to FWQ when the helicopter force was short of experience throughout all MAJCOMs. Thus, AFMPC elected not to fill all the training slots.

In 1981, the helicopter rated management subcommittee met to discuss projected manning levels and experience requirements of the HH-60D, a new helicopter programmed to enter the Air Force inventory in 1987. Initial plans for the "D-model" called for a significant increase in helicopter pilot requirements because no helicopters would be taken out of the active duty inventory the first two years the HH-60D was operational. This resultant increase in operational requirements, along with the new instructor requirements at the helicopter mission training school at Kirtland AFB, NM, would require an additional fifty experienced helicopter pilots to fill these projected authorizations (8 -)

As a result of this meeting, AFMPC raised the issue of training helicopter pilots through UPT first. The proposal would have made the helicopter pilot "universally assignable" and was oriented toward stopping the flow of experience to other weapon systems. But, ATC and Hq USAF/MPP resisted pursuing the initiative because it was contrary to the 1969 Congressional guidance opposing this double training. However, Hq USAF/MPP did reduce the flow of experience to other weapon systems by reducing the FWQ training quota to 10 per year (9 -)

published in December 1974, the recommendation that all helicopter pilots must convert to fixed wing was eliminated, and secondly, the reason for eliminating the guarantee for conversion was strictly a distribution problem within the fixed wing force. Although the target date for FWQ was not affected, the wording of the revised regulation--"based on the needs of the Air Force"-- eliminated the guarantee and served as the basis for further changes in the program.

Fixed wing conversion began in 1976 with training conducted first at Webb AFB TX and later at Sheppard AFB, TX. Since its start, over 300 helicopter pilots have graduated from the program (14--). The yearly production of FWQ graduates is shown in figure 2.

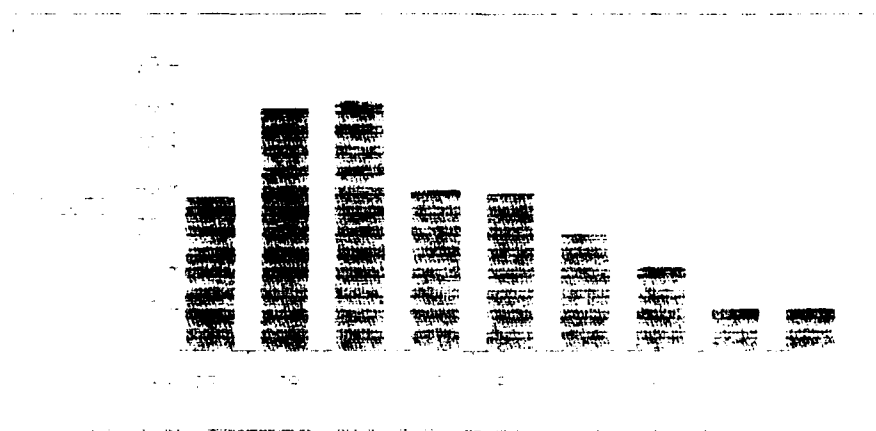


Figure 2. Fixed Wing Conversion Training (14--)

In 1981, an ATC initiative changed the method of accomplishing FWQ from an eight-month specialized course to sending pilots through the full UPT course (7--). ATC defended the change based on three factors:

1. ATC had to find another UPT training base for the program because of the growing Euro/NATO training and airspace requirements at Sheppard AFB, TX.

training program began in FY1970. Through FY1984, approximately 1,250 pilots have been trained by the U.S. Army (17:--). Yearly production figures are

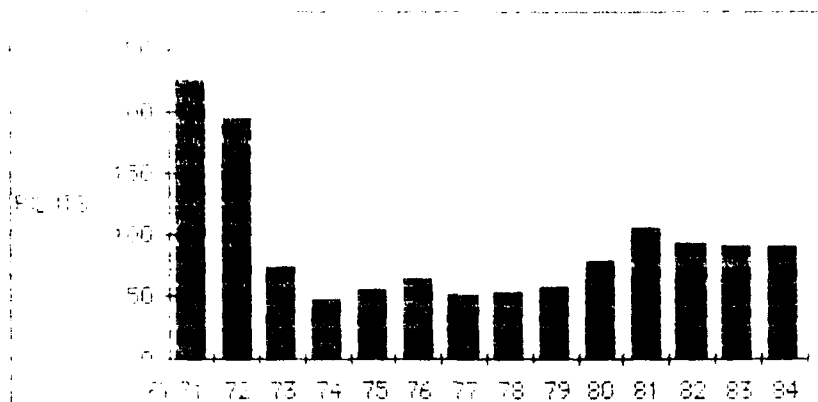


Figure 1. Yearly UPT-H Production (17:--)

(The drastic reduction in training rates in FY1973 was due to the almost total phase-out of the HH-43 "PEDRO" helicopter which reduced helicopter requirements by one-third.)

In December 1974 a new regulation, AFR 51-5, directed how the conversion program would be conducted. The program objective was "to provide career oriented rotary wing pilots with the fixed wing qualification necessary for full assignment and career progression opportunity within the pilot career field" (2:1). The program was to begin in CY 4/76. However, in December 1975, Hq. USAF approved a proposal to eliminate the guaranteed portion of the program for those who enter UPT-H after 1 July 1976. The rationale for the change was a result of rated management/distribution problems of projected overmanning and surpluses within the fixed wing world--a result of the Southeast Asia drawdown (10:--). In an attempt to reduce this projected overmanning, the rated management committee concluded that lowering the helicopter input into fixed wing systems was one step which had to be taken. However, it is important to highlight two significant factors. First, between 1970 and the time AFR 51-5 was

Our total helicopter pilot force is only 1,100. Now, this is a very small percentage of our total pilot force. If these people are specialized to such an extent that they can only fly helicopters, we severely limit the career progression of these individual officers and we greatly complicate the personnel management system (4.1).

Nevertheless, on 3 December 1969, the House Appropriations Committee published a report critical of the Air Force position. In essence it

1. Reduced FY1970 undergraduate pilot training funds by \$10 million
2. Prohibited fixed wing pilot training prior to helicopter training.
3. Suggested consolidation of helo training under Army auspices (4.2)

General John D. Ryan, Air Force Chief of Staff (CSAF), decided not to reclamation this Congressional guidance and chartered an ad hoc group to coordinate a program in which the U.S. Army would provide undergraduate helicopter training for USAF helicopter pilots. This group recommended the following for implementation.

1. Initial undergraduate helicopter training and conversion training conducted by the Army begin in 1971.
2. Conversion training be continued for fixed wing pilots as needed to meet isolated tour requirements and to maintain operational experience in the helicopter force
3. After initial utilization as helicopter pilots, all rotary wing qualified officers who are accepted for career status should be offered fixed wing training. Those not desiring or qualifying for such training should be released from active duty or retrained to meet support requirements (4.3)

The recommendations of this group were accepted, and the new JFTR

Chapter Two

BACKGROUND

In 1966, the requirement for helicopter pilots in Southeast Asia was increasing. Responding to this need, the USAF discontinued training 60 helicopter pilots per year through the undergraduate helicopter training (UHT) program and used this training/flying time to increase the conversion of fixed wing pilots to helicopters--from 220 in 1966 to a high of 378 in 1969 (13:8). Concurrent with this training, the Air Force was converting helicopter pilots, trained in helicopters through UHT prior to September 1966, into fixed wing pilots.

However, the Appropriations Committee of the House of Representatives (91st Congress), in hearings on the Operational and Maintenance portion of the FY1970 Air Force appropriations, questioned the Air Force policy of crosstraining helicopter pilots into fixed wing aircraft. As one committee member stated:

We have had discussions of this in prior years. It was the opinion of this Committee and the Congress in adopting the Committee report on the FY1969 appropriation that this double training be discontinued in view of the cost, and there was some question with respect to the necessity. The requirement is such that there seems to be little doubt but that pilots trained for helicopter work will remain in helicopter work and if, in the future, it should be found they are no longer needed in helicopters they can be retrained for fixed wing aircraft (4:1).

Air force witnesses stated the subject had been studied many times and there were cogent reasons for the policy

alternative training programs and weigh each option against career opportunities and operational requirements. Lastly, Chapter Six will present conclusions and recommendations.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study will examine the background of the UPT-H and FWQ programs since 1969. It will analyze these programs and determine if/how the changes have impacted career opportunities for helicopter pilots. It will suggest and analyze alternative training methods or sequences of training and will recommend courses of action. Through this analysis, the author intends to provide information for use within the rated management community to enact changes in helicopter training programs.

LIMITATIONS

Several limitations will bind this study. First, the analysis of career opportunities for helicopter pilots will be discussed in the framework of personnel and rated management policies within the "pilot" community. Second, the author acknowledges that the term "providing better career opportunities" is ambiguous and extremely difficult to quantify. The author intends to draw on his five years experience within the helicopter assignments/rated management arena at both AFMPC and Hq MAC, and also include the opinions of senior commanders within the helicopter force, to present a realistic assessment of career opportunities. Lastly, alternative training methods will be presented without an in-depth analysis of cost factors associated with this training. The author does not have the available resources to cost new training programs.

ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The background and evolution of UPT-H and FWQ will be presented in Chapter Two. In this chapter, the author will emphasize the management decisions involved in changes in helicopter training programs and bring the reader up to date with current programs. Chapter Three will contain an analysis of how these programs impact career opportunities. Then, Chapter Four will concentrate on future USAF helicopter programs and focus on their influence on helicopter pilot requirements. Chapter Five will examine

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Inherent in the method and sequence of both UPT-H and FWQ training are two distinct situations which affect career opportunities for helicopter pilots. The first problem concerns those pilots who attend FWQ. The program requires an Air Force pilot to attend UPT and be in pipeline training for 15 to 18 months. When you combine this long training time with a new guy/co-pilot OER following training, the result may not be a true indication of the performance and potential of that officer for a two and one-half year period. The second problem involves the career opportunities for those pilots who decline or are not selected for FWQ training. AFR 51-5 refers to these pilots as "limited" (2:1). As "limited" duty/helicopter-only pilots, these individuals are operationally restricted to helicopters with little hope to progress to senior staff or command positions. To illustrate this point, in April 1980, an Air Force spokesman responded in these words to a House Committee on why the Air Force retrain helicopter pilots into fixed wing systems:

Transitioning to a fixed wing pilot enhances a helicopter pilot's chance for full career progression through increased opportunities to serve in senior staff/command positions. This fact impacts not only on recruiting efforts for potential helicopter pilots, but undoubtedly accounts in part for the substantially higher helicopter pilot retention rate compared to the remainder of the pilot force (12:H-245).

This study will address these two related, but distinct, issues:

1. Is the Air Force providing realistic career opportunities for those who accept FWQ as well as for those who either decline conversion or are not selected for conversion?
2. Can the Air Force provide better career opportunities for helicopter pilots by enacting changes to the current fixed wing conversion program and/or undergraduate helicopter pilot training program, while continuing to meet experience requirements in the helicopter force?

Chapter Four

REQUIREMENTS

The USAF has two programs being worked by the Air Staff which will impact pilot requirements in the helicopter force. First, the recent Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) signed by the Chiefs of Staff of the United States Army and Air Force affects the vertical-lift portion of the Air Force's Special Operation Forces and may ultimately reduce helicopter pilot requirements (1:1; 5:4); and secondly, the programmed buy of the HH-60D helicopter, procured to enhance the Search and Rescue mission/capabilities of the Air Force, will increase helicopter experience requirements (8:1). The impact of these ongoing programs must be considered before presenting alternatives in the following chapter.

The MOA, signed in May 1984 by the Chiefs of Staff of both the Air Force and the Army, would transfer mission responsibility for the vertical-lift portion of Special Operations from the USAF to the Army. While the details (and feasibility) of this agreement are still being worked by the two Services, the possible effect on USAF requirements are significant.

First, if the USAF loses the Special Operations mission without losing the assets dedicated to this mission (specifically HH-53H and UH-1N aircraft), then these assets will be redistributed to the Combat Search and Rescue mission. The result of this type transfer will keep helicopter force manning at the same levels while losing approximately 50% of those staff requirements at MAJCOM level and above (i.e., REDCOM, Hq USAF/XOO), which are specific helicopter/Special Operations authorizations (14--). To illustrate this. Presently, the helicopter pilot force represents 47% of the total USAF pilot force. However, of the pilots assigned to operational

positions above MAJCOM, helicopter pilots represent just 2.9% of the total. If the Special Operations mission requirements are transferred to the Army, then the USAF Special Operations helicopter expertise will no longer be required on these staffs. As a result, this current 2.9% helicopter presence would be reduced, making it even more difficult for assignment "opportunities" in the operational world (17:--).

The second possible scenario would transfer both the mission and the HH-53H helicopters to the Army. If this occurs, then both the helicopter force and staff manning would be reduced, resulting in an even smaller requirement for helicopter expertise in the Air Force. When you review the MOA in general, the bottom line is that both options under consideration have adverse affects on career opportunities for helicopter pilots.

The second major program involves the USAF acquisition of the HH-60D. This helicopter, with its low level/all weather capability, has a proposed initial operational capability (IOC) of 1987 (14:--). With the phase-in of this highly complex weapon system, experience cockpit requirements will increase because of the differences in experience definitions between the H-60 and the UH-1/H-3 helicopters it is programmed to replace (17:--). With this increase in cockpit experience requirements, continuing the flow of four-to-seven year helicopter pilots to FWQ will decrease overall experience levels at a time when more experience is needed. As a result, this reduced cockpit experience will put pressure on the personnel system to curtail the loss of experience by decreasing career broadening assignments for helicopter pilots (i.e. rated supplement) and may possibly result in the termination/reduction of the FWQ program during this build-up period. These actions will adversely affect promotions throughout the helicopter force.

SUMMARY

In summary, the USAF helicopter force is entering a very critical period. The decisions involved in the MOA and the procurement of the HH-60D, the first new aircraft in the USAF helicopter inventory since the 1960s, will significantly affect career opportunities for helicopter pilots. Regardless of

the eventual outcome of the MOA, with the HH-60 addition, the need for more experience in the helicopter cockpit is evident. Thus, in the next chapter, alternatives will be suggested which will focus on both the problem of limited career opportunities for helicopter pilots and future experience requirements in the helicopter force.

Chapter Five

COURSES OF ACTION

Up to this point, the reader has been exposed to the background of UPT-H and the fixed wing conversion programs, the impact these programs have on career opportunities for helicopter pilots, and a brief review of future requirements in the helicopter force. While the USAF may continue with current training programs, there are options available which would improve career opportunities for helicopter pilots and, at the same time, provide the required experience needed in the helicopter force. Following are two options which specifically address these issues.

OPTION 1

Since 1980, the USAF has been planning to modify the UPT program. The specialized undergraduate pilot training (SUPT) concept involving a dual track training program--either a fighter, attack, recce (FAR) or a tanker, transport, bomber (TTB) training syllabus--was approved by the Air Force Chief of Staff and the Secretary of the Air Force. The scheduled implementation date is 1988 (20:--). As an adjunct to this program, the first option would be for the USAF to adopt a tri-track SUPT syllabus instead of the planned dual track training program. Figure 4 illustrates the dual track SUPT program with the proposed tri-track option. This option would provide all Air Force pilots identical training up through the primary phase of training. Then, instead of pilots breaking off into two specific training tracks, the split would involve a third specialized track--helicopters.

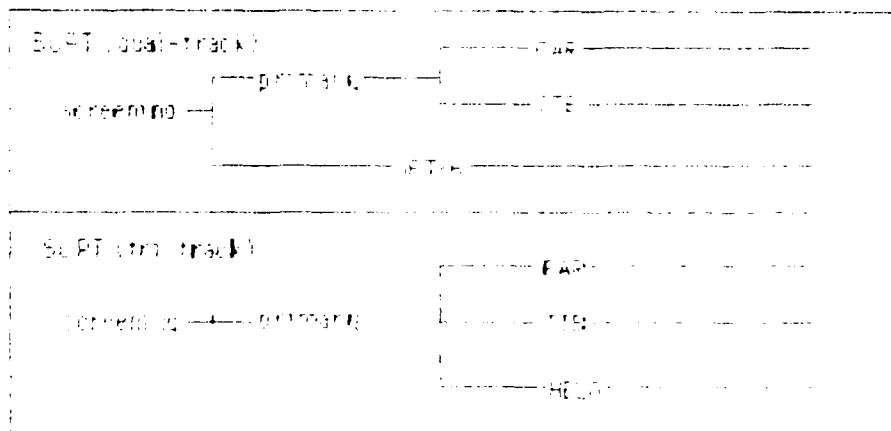


Figure 4. Specialized Undergraduate Pilot Training. (20:--)

As mentioned above, with Option 1 all Air Force pilots would undergo the same initial primary training phase. (At Fort Rucker, USAF students do not enter the Air Force unique phase of UPT-H, or fly with USAF instructors, until the last six weeks of training.) This option would employ the same initial standards/quality control for all Air Force pilots. In addition to this, the advantages to this option are:

1. This option eliminates the need for a fixed wing conversion program. As dual-rated pilots, crossflow to other weapon systems would be possible at any point in an officer's career without spending an inordinate amount of time in UPT pipeline training at a critical time in their career--as is the case now. As a result, career opportunities would be comparable to the dual-rated pilots now in the helicopter force.

2. The loss to crossflow, specifically from the four-to-seven year group, would be reduced, thus, increasing the experience levels in each helicopter system. While crossflow would still be possible, it would be spread across the entire force/year groups.

On balance, there are two challenges this option surfaces which will require further study prior to implementation.

1 The proposed training would cost more than current programs. By comparison, ten UPT slots for FWQ versus some fixed wing training up front for all helicopter pilots.

2 The on-going concern from Congress about dual training. As recent as 1979, Congress was still investigating why the Navy/Marines conducted dual training (11--). In their original 1969 mandate, the Navy was included in the consolidation directive (444).

Option 2

As discussed earlier, the Air Force conducts conversion training via UPT, four-to-seven years following graduation from UPT-H. Option 2 departs from this FWQ policy by eliminating the four-to-seven year window and by changing the method of training. Each of these proposed changes will be discussed separately below:

1. Eliminate the four-to-seven year FWQ window. Doing away with this restriction would provide more experience to the helicopter force, like Option 1, by spreading crossflow losses across the entire helicopter force. Attendant with this change would be the opportunity for helicopter pilots to crossflow at any time in their career. In effect, crossflow would be similar to the dual-rated group now in the helicopter force. Additionally, by eliminating the eligibility window, you also eliminate the competitive FWQ board held each year. This would go a long way in resolving the negative aspects of not being selected--the "I'm not good enough for fixed wing attitude!"

2. Change to short course conversion training in lieu of training through UPT. With this option, pilots would receive conversion training through a two or three-month short course program conducted in one of the following three ways:

a Air Training Command provides the training in the T-37/T-46

aircraft. This training would consist of approximately 30 to 40 hours of flying/simulator time in a 2-3 month period

b. Military Airlift Command provides the conversion training within MAC at the Central Training Facility (CTF) at Scott AFB, IL. The CTF presently conducts all mission training in the T-39 aircraft and will be conducting mission training in the C-21 and C-12 aircraft in the near future. Training time/hours would be similar to those discussed above.

c. The USAF contracts with the Army for quotas in their helicopter to fixed wing conversion course at Fort Rucker, AL. This course was set up by the Army to provide pilots for their fixed wing aircraft. This course provides 50 flying hours and 21 simulator hours in a 10 week period (16 --)

The advantages of this option are similar to Option 1. First, it would provide better career opportunities for helicopter pilots by expanding the crossflow opportunity. It also reduces the negative aspects of conversion training through UPT, and finally, it provides increased experience levels in the helicopter cockpit. In addition, it is the least costly option--when compared to the way training is conducted now or when compared to Option 1. Each of the three alternative training methods would be more economical and reduce the time spent in training.

The major disadvantage of Option 2 is one of perception rather than substance. Helicopter pilots may initially see this type of change in a negative manner--a loss of the fixed wing conversion opportunity as the FWQ program is ended. It will take some crossflow to eliminate this type of reaction, but if crossflow occurs early, this perception should be short-lived.

In summary, both of the suggested options are aimed at improving career opportunities for helicopter pilots and satisfying the increasing experience requirements in the helicopter force. The author contends either option would provide better career opportunities and provide more experience in the cockpit than the current method of conducting training.

Chapter six

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine two issues. First, is the USAF providing realistic career opportunities for helicopter pilots who attend fixed wing conversion as well as those who remain in helicopters? And secondly, could the USAF provide better opportunities by enacting changes while continuing to meet operational requirements in the helicopter force? The author has attempted to provide an objective analysis of these two issues by presenting his impressions of "career opportunities" which have been formed the past five years is the assignments business at MAC and AFMPC. In addition, the author wanted to reflect the opinions of the senior leadership of the helicopter force, most of whom are experiencing their first tour in the helicopter world, and interject their analysis of "career opportunities" for helicopter pilots with a broader perspective.

The answers to these two issues, although subjective, are based on the realities of personnel management in the Air Force today. The answer is that the USAF can provide better "career opportunities" for helicopter pilots by enacting changes to training programs. In doing so, the experience levels in the helicopter force will be increased--a fact which is totally supported by the leadership in the helicopter force.

The author believes it is important to change the program now, before several years of lieutenant colonel and colonel promotion statistics support the fact that a closed-loop, limited duty helicopter force is not a healthy

situation. This paper has identified two options which, if adopted, would resolve the issues before they become major problems. Seldom do we have the opportunity to examine a situation and implement changes before a problem becomes significant and solutions are then labeled reactions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The author recommends (1) that Option 2 be adopted immediately. The USAF should accomplish fixed wing conversion through short course training and discontinue training through UPT--thereby resolving the two issues presented in the study. This option would also provide the most expeditious and least costly method to resolve the situation. But, this option would first require study by the helicopter rated management sub-committee to identify the best method to conduct conversion training prior to implementation. In addition to this recommendation, the author also recommends (2) the Air Staff (USAF/XO/MP) study the possibility of implementing Option 1 concurrently with the start of SUPT in 1988. But, study of this option should not prevent the immediate enactment of Option 2. Rather, the study should be with the intention of arriving at an optimal, long-term solution to the issue.

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